UNDERSTANDING THE ENSEMBLE PIANIST:

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to develop a theoretical model of the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance as perceived by the pianist and to identify the factors affecting this process. The research has followed an inductive interpretative approach applying qualitative methods. The analytic material was collected through the process of interviewing and analysed following Grounded Theory procedures and techniques as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The analysis of the data allowed five categories to emerge, namely, Searching for Balance, Externalisation of Attention, Regulating, Time Availability and Achieving Integration which mainly reflected the pianists' thoughts and concerns about their participation in ensemble music making in relation to the co-performers' co-action as they collectively attempt to reach for high quality in musical ensemble performance. The five categories were eventually brought together in an integrative model to propose elements of a theory of the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance from the pianist's point-of-view. This paper will present the emergent theoretical framework together with an account of the methodological process followed.

KEYWORDS

Pianist

Musical Performance

Ensemble Playing

Group Interaction

Grounded Theory

INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to develop a theoretical model of the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance from the pianist's, as an ensemble member's, point of view and to identify the factors affecting this process. Pianists with relevant experience were interviewed to identify the perceived steps towards the production of a satisfying collective musical result for those involved. The aim was not to investigate the musical performance per se, but to shed light on those issues that a pianist belonging in such a group would perceive to be significant in the group's preparation for a high quality performance.

Here, **musical performance** will be defined as one 'in which a performer, or a group of performers, self-consciously enacts music for an audience. In our Western culture, such music is often written by someone not directly involved in the performance. The performers realize a pre-existent composition' (Sloboda, 1985, p.67). As such, a musical performance is the end result of the musicians' preparation and involves a single attempt to play the music in the best possible way aiming to make the performance a worthy experience for the audience and the performer(s) involved.

The **musical ensemble** represents an interesting study case in the framework of the musical performance since, in addition to the requirements imposed upon the player in any musical performance, ensemble playing carries the extra weight of inter-performer interactions. The relevant literature, in particular, suggests that the nature and quality of interactions among co-performers in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication largely determine the quality of the musical production itself (Davidson, 1997; Young & Colman, 1979; Murninghan & Conlon, 1991; Yarbrough, 1975). The musical ensemble, therefore, can be viewed as both a task performance system as well as a socio-emotional entity where the latter seems to largely determine and define the performance of the task at least as perceived by the participating musicians themselves.

The interest in studying the **pianist's point of view** arose out of the consideration of the diverse roles that the pianist may adopt in music making. Firstly, given its harmonic and melodic nature, the piano is a musically self-contained instrument being perfectly capable of producing complete and self-sufficient sounds as a solo instrument. The pianist, therefore, can effectively function as a solo player in the musical performance. In this case, the pianist emerges as an autonomous type of musician characterised by strong individuality and an ability to create his/her own interpretation (Kemp, 1996).

Additionally, its harmonic and timbre possibilities make the piano a popular and essential companion in most small musical ensembles offering the harmonic background for the single-line string and wind instruments (Kentner, 1991). Indeed, a wide variety of works where the piano holds a crucial role, exist, such as piano duos, trios, quartets and quintets. On the other hand, the pianist may perform an accompanist's role in the musical ensemble in the sense of providing musical support to a soloist, such as a singer, a wind or string instrumentalist, in order to assist him/her perform at his/her best (Moore, 1994; Duchen, 1994; Spillman, 1985).

The consideration of the multi-functional role of the pianist in the musical performance generated an interest in trying to understand how ensemble pianists perceive their role in group music making drawing on the similarities and any possible differences between accompanying and chamber music playing.

This paper will give an account of the methodological process followed and will present the emergent theoretical model. No raw data will be presented here due to space limitations. Instead, the elements of each category will be visually represented in the form of a chart to illustrate the nature of the main elements of the emerging theory.

METHODOLOGY

The research has followed an inductive interpretative approach applying qualitative methods with the aim of identifying how pianists perceive the process through which a high quality performance can be reached. On the one hand, the study aimed to allow the important analytic dimensions to emerge from the data without imposing prior expectations and assumptions on the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). The study's adherence to an interpretative analytic design, on the other hand, served the purpose of understanding and explaining the research participants' experiences from the 'inside' (Charmaz, 1995) by trying to shed light on the meanings that pianists assign to the issue of group interaction in musical ensemble performance. In particular, the study employed the Grounded Theory approach as a qualitative method of data analysis (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The Grounded Theory approach was chosen as an appropriate methodological tool since it allows the researcher to inductively build theory from the interpretation of the data, which was also the study's main objective. The researcher does not have any preconceived concepts or hypotheses before embarking on a Grounded Theory project. Instead, the analytic categories derive directly from the data leading to the development of theory based on the respondents' perceptions and interpretations.

DATA COLLECTION

INTERVIEWS

Since the main objective of the study was to uncover pianists' viewpoints on issues of group interaction in ensemble playing rather than attempting to explore the ensemble members' actions as would be perceived by an outside observer, it was considered appropriate to use interviews in order to investigate pianists' inner perceptions on this issue (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

The study was of the semi-structured interview type. This is particularly useful when a detailed picture of the respondent's viewpoints and perceptions on a particular topic needs to be gained (Smith, 1995). This study attempted to capture all potentially relevant aspects of the topic under investigation by basing the data collection on the rearrangement of the questions and the introduction of new ones according to emerging themes and issues (for a sample of the interview schedule see Appendix). Indeed, the study's respondents led the conversation as any interesting issues that arose were further followed and elaborated in detail. Moreover, since in Grounded Theory the analysis literally emerges and is shaped by the nature of the collected data, the analysis in this study began as soon as the first bit of information was collected. Data analysis then drove subsequent data collection aiming towards developing theory. However, where can the data necessary for the development of the evolving theory be obtained? This question is answered by following the logic and procedures of theoretical sampling discussed in the next section.

THEORETICAL SAMPLING

The sampling process carries particular significance since it represents the conceptual building blocks of the evolving research. Sampling needs to be 'purposeful' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in other words, it needs to be planned and conducted thoughtfully, since the sample of respondents will affect the collected information and will determine the researcher's interpretations about the meaning of that information (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The term 'purposeful sampling' is more or less synonymous with the term 'theoretical sampling' used by the developers of Grounded Theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the latter term underlines particularly the evolving nature of the sampling procedure, which is based on concepts that emerged from the analysis and that appear to have relevance to the evolving theory. Sampling in Grounded Theory, therefore, proceeds on theoretical grounds, i.e. in terms of concepts and incidents, and not persons (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

There are three types of theoretical sampling in Grounded Theory, namely, open sampling, axial and selective sampling, following the purpose and the logic of the three types of coding (see section on Coding Procedures). At the open sampling stage of the study, the aim was to generate as many potentially relevant categories as possible. As far as the axial kind of sampling was concerned, the categories and subcategories that were uncovered during open sampling were now related to each other, and relationships were proposed among the subcategories of each category by specifically identifying the conditions that give rise to each category, the strategies employed and the resulting consequences. Sampling on the basis of selective coding allowed the integration of categories along the dimensional level to form a theory. Sampling at this stage became directed and deliberate in order to 'maximize opportunities for verifying the story line, relationships between categories, and for filling in poorly developed categories' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.187).

During data collection, the content of the interview schedule became more and more focused to accommodate to the logic and the aims of the three types of sampling. In other words, the questions asked gained new focus as more concepts and relationships emerged from the analysis.

The pianists interviewed were classically trained professionals having participated on various occasions in musical ensemble performances and had, therefore, acquired extensive ensemble playing experience. The original sample included nine pianists who lived and/or worked around the University of Sheffield area. Subsequently, the number of participants was gradually increased in a two-fold manner. Firstly, some of the pianists interviewed nominated others who they thought might have been worth talking to. This is known as snowball or chain sampling and it is used to locate potentially good interview subjects in providing rich information for the topic under investigation (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Additionally, web search facilities were used in identifying potential participants that

fulfilled the study's requirements. The pianists were contacted and given information about the aims and the process of the research. If they were willing to take part in the study, visiting arrangements were made. Equal numbers of both male and female pianists were interviewed. The age of the interview participants ranged from 25 to 55 years. The final analysis was based on twenty semi-structured interviews.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS AND PILOT RESEARCH

The researcher needs to consider a number of ethical obligations such as asking for permission to record, being honest about the intended use and purposes of the research, letting people know that their participation is fully voluntary, that anonymity will be preserved and that, if they wish, their answers will be kept confidential (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). All these ethical obligations were taken into account during the interviewing process. The interviews took place in three stages over twenty months. The first five interviews represented the study's pilot research as their results led to the identification of interesting areas that would shape the content of the next interview schedule.

After the first five interviews, five more interviews followed which allowed further focusing on emergent areas and issues of interest. The analysis of those ten interviews led to the identification of five categories along with some of their conditions, strategies and consequences. The ten final interviews aimed to further develop the emergent categories in terms of the elements of the paradigm model (see section on Coding Procedures) and verify, modify or discard the assumptions and hypotheses raised during the analytic process.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in order to maintain closeness to the meaning of the data and preserve the participants' own words. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and a half. An attempt was particularly made for the interviewees to feel comfortable and willing to express their views in an unconstrained, open and direct manner. For this reason, each interview started with an informal 'warm-up' type of

conversation before the main topic of the research was introduced and further elaborated. Moreover, all interviews took place in the pianists' own personal or professional space which seemed to enhance feelings of security and ease.

DATA ANALYSIS

There is a systematic set of procedures for conducting Grounded Theory research. These procedures facilitate the researcher's theoretical sensitivity and the application of detailed and well-developed coding processes.

THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY

Theoretical sensitivity is a term often associated with Grounded Theory. It is considered to be an essential attribute allowing the researcher to make sense of the data by perceiving the subtle nuances and meanings in data, recognising similarities, delicate differences, and the connections between concepts. This process, deriving from the researcher's theoretical sensitivity, will allow the developing theory to be 'well integrated', 'conceptually dense' and 'grounded' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42).

Not all researchers have the same degree of theoretical sensitivity. There may be varying degrees of sensitivity depending upon the researcher's knowledge, experience and familiarity with the area under study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), theoretical sensitivity may come from different sources, such as the reading of the relevant literature, the researcher's professional and personal experience, and the analytic process itself (pp.42-43). These sources have been used here. The use of the research literature, in particular, assisted the formulation of an initial set of questions, which would guide the first interviews. Relevant literature was also sought during the research itself to stimulate further research questions during the process. After the data collection and analysis, another literature search was conducted in order to reflect on the validity of the findings. The researcher's professional experience was used as another source of theoretical sensitivity. This came

from the development of understanding of the field under investigation by being involved in performing as a pianist in musical ensembles. Furthermore, personal experience had been gained by interaction with performing musical ensembles.

The final source of theoretical sensitivity, the analytic process itself, was developed during the analysis through a consistent interaction with the data by making comparisons, asking questions, developing concepts and reflecting on their relationships.

CODING PROCEDURES

Coding refers to the researcher's analytic work. It involves a process of working with theoretical sensitivity to make comparisons and discover relationships and variations in the data. There are three types of coding involved: open, axial and selective.

The open coding procedure gives names and categorises the emergent phenomena in the data. The concepts that seemed to apply to the same phenomenon were then grouped together and led to the emergence of categories. Each category had several properties or characteristics which were expressed in terms of different dimensions, and was given a more abstract conceptual name than the concepts grouped under it. The conceptual names given to the data were drawn from the literature, from the pianists' own words following the "in-vivo" naming technique, or they were given other descriptive names because of the imagery or meaning they called forth when examined comparatively and in their context (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The axial coding part of the analysis involved the development of categories by unravelling the relationships between a category (the phenomenon) and its subcategories with the application of the Paradigm Model. This lies at the heart of the Grounded Theory analytic procedures. It provides the researcher with an analytic scheme that can be used to organise the emerging connections around a phenomenon. In particular, through the application of the Paradigm Model, the phenomenon is developed in terms of the causal,

contextual and intervening conditions that give rise to it, the action/interaction strategies adopted to manage the phenomenon and its results or consequences. To differentiate among the three different kinds of conditions, causal conditions refer to the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon, the context is the particular set of characteristics that pertain to a phenomenon, and intervening conditions are the broad and general conditions acting to either facilitate or constrain the action/interactional strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

It was appropriate to stop collecting data when each category was fully developed in terms of its relationships and no new information came from additional interviews. The researcher, therefore, decides that the point of theoretical saturation had been reached. Reaching the point of theoretical saturation seems to acquire particular importance in Grounded Theory projects since, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued, 'unless a researcher gathers data until all categories are saturated, the theory will be unevenly developed and lacking density and precision' (p.212).

The selective type of coding referred to the process of selecting the core category, which is the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated, and systematically relating the other categories to the core category by means of the paradigm, i.e. conditions, context, strategies, consequences. The main interest here was how pianists perceive their participation in the musical ensemble. The analysis of the interview data allowed the identification of such individual actions and group interactions to emerge. Moreover, their effects both upon the interacting musicians and on the quality of the musical product were gradually revealed. The core concept that appeared to link all categories together was found to be the musicians' desire to reach high quality in the ensemble performance as seen from the perspective of the pianists interviewed. *Figure 1* presents a graphical representation of the coding procedures used in this study.

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MEMOS

Grounded theorists consider the writing of memos as a particularly significant activity during the data analysis process since these represent the intermediary stage between the collection of data and the first draft of the completed analysis. Memos are simply the researcher's thoughts, any ideas, questions, hypotheses, comparisons that may arise during the coding process (open, axial and selective) and seem relevant or are likely to have some theoretical significance for the issue under investigation. For Glaser, the writing of theoretical memos is 'the core stage in the process of generating theory, the bedrock of theory generation' (1978, p.83). The power of memos to generate theory lies on their potential, firstly, to reveal processes in the data, secondly, to define patterns by going beyond individual cases and, last but not least, to explore 'implicit, unstated and condensed meanings' (Charmaz, 1995, p.43).

The analytic process here used three different memo types, namely, quotation memos, code memos and general theoretical memos, which were facilitated by ATLAS.ti, a software designed to facilitate the analysis of qualitative data (Muhr, 1997). The quotation memos were those comments associated with a specific quotation and were used to highlight its significance or likely contribution in the evolving theory. The code memos were used to explain the meaning of a particular code or illuminate possible relations among codes. They included, in other words, comments relevant to both open and axial coding processes. Finally, the general theoretical memos involved any emergent hypotheses or assumptions which would then have to be checked against actual data in order to be verified, modified or discarded from the evolving theoretical framework..

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

This study has made use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of validity. They propose four criteria, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which are close to the nature and logic of qualitative research.

CREDIBILITY

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest five major techniques that can enhance the credibility of qualitative research findings: activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced (*prolonged engagement*, *persistent observation*, *triangulation*), peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks.

Activities Increasing the Probability that Credible Findings will be Produced

Prolonged engagement 'is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents and building trust' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.301). Firstly, being a pianist myself, I had participated in ensemble playing both as an accompanist and as a chamber music player on various occasions and, as a result, I was already familiar with the 'culture' of ensemble playing especially as the pianist perceives it.

Secondly, I tried to avoid both personal and respondents' distortions. On the one hand, I spent some time explaining to the interviewees my ensemble playing experience as a pianist and the reasons that led me to the choice of the research topic. I tried in this way to become accepted by the study's pianists as a member of their 'culture' and avoid being a 'stranger in a strange land' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.302). Moreover, to avoid distortions based on my own 'a priori values and constructions', I kept an open-minded attitude basing the analysis exclusively on the data generated and not forcing my own preconceptions into the research. On the other hand, to avoid distortions introduced by the respondents, I ensured that the questions were constructed simply and clearly by rephrasing questions when necessary.

Additionally, I tried to make sure that the respondents would not answer in an 'appropriate' way by making clear at the beginning of the interview that I did not expect particular answers.

Persistent observation provides depth and salience to the research. It particularly aims to 'identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.304). To meet this aspect of credibility, the researcher needs to sort out irrelevancies and avoid coming to a premature closure. This research took place at three different stages during a period of twenty months. Each interview essentially led to the next one where more and more adaptations and refocusing of the topic were made as the most significant issues for the interviewees were revealed. Furthermore, the collection of data did not stop until all the categories had been sufficiently developed in terms of their properties and dimensions and no more new information was provided. This was a sign that the data collection phase had reached the point of theoretical saturation.

The technique of triangulation refers to the application of various sources and methods of data collection to increase the credibility of research findings. However, it was not seen as appropriate for triangulation to be applied here for the following two reasons. Firstly, the research sought to apply purely qualitative methods for the purpose of investigating the pianists' points of view on the issue of the attainment of high quality in ensemble playing using an inductive interpretative approach. Secondly, since the study's main interest was the exploration of pianists' inner perceptions and not their actions as would be perceived by an external observer, other qualitative modes of data collection, such as observation, would produce findings falling out of the study's scope.

Peer debriefing

The technique of peer debriefing has been explained as 'a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.308). In short, the debriefer could be someone from the researcher's professional environment who could play the role of the 'devil's advocate' in giving his/her critical and honest suggestions about the process and the findings of the research. Here, the role of the debriefer was played by two other experienced researchers who had experience in the same substantive area and were well aware of the study's aims and objectives as well as of the processes that led to the research design and proposal, and the construction of the interview schedule. In particular, they tested concepts and their relationships and challenged interpretations of the data helping to bring forth and examine unthought-of aspects of the phenomenon.

Negative Case Analysis

This technique refers to the process of constantly refining a hypothesis 'until it accounts for all known cases without exception' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.309). The present study did not make use of the negative case analysis technique because the aim was not to test any preconceived hypotheses. Rather, the relevant issues and their relationships were allowed to emerge. However, it needs to be emphasised that instances of each category in the form of conditions, context, strategies and consequences can be found in all interviewees' comments and the 'umbrella' major concepts were mentioned and explained by most pianists.

Referential Adequacy

Referential adequacy refers to storing the raw data in archives so that different analysts can 'reach similar conclusions' and 'test the validity of the conclusions' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.313). All interviewing material was imported in the Atlas-ti software for easy

access. This, however, could invoke ethical conflicts since the interviewees were informed at the beginning of the study that the information they provided would only be used for the purposes of the current research.

Member Checks

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that member checking is the most important technique for establishing credibility. It involves asking the participants to check the research findings and provide feedback on their credibility. After the first coding had been conducted, new interviewees were asked to verify, modify or discard previously given information and explain the reasons for doing so. The provision of feedback about emergent issues and hypotheses was assured throughout the data collection. Additionally, the final analytic findings were confirmed by previously interviewed participants.

TRANSFERABILITY

This study does not claim that the proposed theoretical model can be applied in the case of all small musical ensembles. Not being able to make claims regarding the external validity of the inquiry, i.e. the generalisation of the results, comments can only be made about the potential for transferability. 'The best advice to give to anyone seeking to make a transfer is to accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgements possible' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.298). According to Robson (1993), the responsibility now shifts to the person interested in making such a transfer.

DEPENDABILITY

The criterion of dependability is analogous to reliability whose key concepts, as mentioned above, are those of stability and consistency (see definitions provided by Hammersley, 1987). Regarding qualitative research, however, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that 'the naturalist sees reliability as part of a larger set of factors that are associated

with observed changes. In order to demonstrate what may be taken as a substitute criterion for reliability - dependability - the naturalist seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change. It can be argued that this naturalist view is broader than the conventional, since it accounts for everything that is normally included in the concept of reliability plus some additional factors' (p.299). Techniques for enhancing dependability involve triangulation and the operation of an inquiry auditor whose responsibility is to examine the process of the inquiry as well as its product, in other words, to ensure its internal coherence by attesting that the interpretations and recommendations made are supported by data. For reasons explained in the following section, an inquiry auditor has not been appointed in this project. However, all findings have been supported by raw data in all cases.

CONFIRMABILITY

The confirmability criterion in qualitative inquiry places emphasis on the data rather than on the investigator. 'The issue is no longer the investigator's characteristics but the characteristics of the data: Are they or are they not confirmable? The naturalist prefers this concept to that of objectivity' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.300). The major technique proposed by Lincoln and Guba for attesting confirmability is provided by the confirmability audit. It involves the appointment of a person as auditor to examine categories of information provided by the investigator (the audit trail), such as raw data, analysis products, process and personal notes, pilot forms, schedules and so on, and determine the project's auditability, in other words, whether the material is comprehensible, useful and linked to the purposes of the study. It is, however, as Robson (1993) maintains, 'over-optimistic, and probably over-formalistic, to expect all small-scale researchers to follow this route at this time' (p.407).

The present study was not tested by a confirmability auditor in the manner described above due to financial constraints but Robson's suggestion was kept in mind throughout and all material was collected and analysed as if audited in this way.

Finally, in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice, a reflexive journal containing information about self and method was maintained. It included material on daily scheduling, personal reflections and methodological decisions. This was provided throughout the course of the study and archived in the form of memos in the Atlas-ti software.

SELECTIVE CODING PROCEDURES

The selective coding procedures involve the execution of a number of steps in accordance with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) recommendations. The researcher needs to explicate the story line, select the core category and integrate all the other categories around the core category by means of the paradigm, i.e. conditions, context, strategies, consequences. These eventually form the essential building blocks of the theory.

The main interest here was how pianists perceive their participation in the musical ensemble. The analysis of the interview data allowed the identification of individual actions and group interactions to emerge. Moreover, their effects both upon the interacting musicians and on the quality of the musical product were gradually revealed. The story line of the present study, therefore, would present the pianists' perceptions on the steps taken by the interacting musicians to attain high quality in musical ensemble performance together with the conditions and consequences of such actions. Ultimately, the coding and analysis of the data led to the emergence of five categories: *Searching for Balance*, *Externalisation of Attention*, *Regulating*, *Time Availability* and *Achieving Integration* (see *Figures 2, 3, 4, 5* and

6 for a graphical representation of the main elements of each category as emerged from the analysis).

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CODE INTERRELATIONS

This section attempts to bring together the primary elements of the proposed theoretical model in a more abstract level of analysis. It is interesting to notice how the relations among the codes point out the identification of connections among the categories themselves. Indeed, the same code could represent different component parts of the paradigm model in different categories. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) maintained, in particular, 'the consequences of one set of actions may become part of the conditions (as context or intervening ones) affecting the next set of action/interactions occurring in a sequence – or even part of conditions that follow in still another sequence. Therefore, what are consequences of action/interaction at one point in time may become part of the conditions in another' (p.106).

Overall, forty-nine instances of code interrelations, i.e. one code appearing in more than one category, have been identified which allowed the emergence of connections among the five major categories. Recognising the limits of space, twelve illustrative cases are cited below (for a visual representation of how some of these codes interrelate see also *figure 7*).

The *achieving co-ordination* code was linked to a number of codes in the category searching for balance such as experience facilitation, technical ability, musical balance, being inseparable but distinct and it was also a consequence of the musicians' attempt to externalise their attention and achieve effective communication with one another.

The code *technical ability* was identified as an intervening condition in the categories searching for balance and externalisation of attention. It was additionally linked to a number

of codes in the regulating category, such as the piano as an anchor instrument and the codes musical adaptation and piano music requirements.

The code *connection/empathy* was linked to the familiarity code in the category time availability in the sense that the pianists interviewed expressed the desire to connect and empathise with one another for a musical performance of high quality. In turn, these feelings assisted them perform at their best and achieve integration with the co-performers (Achieving Integration category)

The code *visual communication* appeared in the category externalisation of attention indicating the use of the visual sense as a means through which ensemble musicians can direct their attention towards the ensemble environment. Communicating effectively through the visual mode was also found to be a strategy employed by the ensemble musicians to perform at their best in the category achieving integration.

The importance of an *active* kind of *listening* appeared in all categories. Firstly, the code *listening to partners* was identified as a strategy employed by the ensemble musicians during their search for balance and their attempt to communicate aurally with each other in the externalisation of attention category. It also facilitated the players' ability to instantly recognise and react to cues given from the co-performers in the regulating category. Moreover, the code *aural communication* was associated as a strategy with the players' achievement of integration and a kind of active listening signified an element of quality resulting from the existence of enough preparation time in the category time availability.

Furthermore, searching for balance and getting involved in an externalisation of attention process were found to improve the ensemble musicians' listening ability, out of which finding the code *learning to listen* was identified.

The code *difficult to listen* was one of the drawbacks of the ensemble musicians' reliance on sight-reading ability. It appeared in the externalisation of attention category as an

intervening condition and in the time availability category as a consequence of the musicians' focus on quantity rather than quality when there was not enough practice time available.

The code *informed action* appeared under the categories searching for balance, externalisation of attention and regulating. It generally signified the importance for the ensemble musician to judge his/her intentions against the co-performers' actions and act accordingly.

The code *spontaneity* was linked to four categories, namely, externalisation of attention, regulating, time availability and achieving integration. In particular, being spontaneous in the musical ensemble served the purpose of introducing or acting on the basis of unexpected musical ideas initiated by the co-performers for the generation and transmittance of an element of excitement and emotional thrill to listeners as well as among co-performers during the performance.

The code *getting out of self* appeared under the category externalisation of attention as a contextual condition where it allowed the musicians to step out of their self in order to be constantly aware of the co-performers. In addition, it signified the co-performers' attempt to lose caution and overcome technical preoccupations and other worries in order to generate and transmit an element of excitement, spontaneity and emotional thrill to the listeners in the achieving integration category.

The code *musical adaptation* was linked with both the searching for balance and regulating categories. It denoted, on the one hand, the ensemble players' attempt to adapt musically to each other in order to reach common musical ground and, on the other, the accompanist's role in adapting to the soloist's needs for the purpose of assisting him/her to perform at his/her best. Similarly, the code following indicated the accompanist's role in

facilitating the soloist's performance and also appeared in the searching for balance and regulating categories.

The *learning to be fast* code was linked to the categories of regulating and time availability and denoted an important attribute for the ensemble pianist, namely, being able to rapidly recognise and respond to cues given from co-performers and to quickly adapt to the requirements of the ensemble rehearsal.

STORY LINE

The main story concerns the process through which high quality can be attained in musical ensemble performance as perceived by the pianist-as-member-of-the-ensemble. Aiming for high quality in performance required the ensemble players to reach common musical ground and achieve co-ordination out of the plurality of ideas and performance approaches brought into the ensemble playing context by balancing the extremes regarding both interpretative considerations as well as their personal characteristics. The main reason why this equilibrium seeking process needed to occur was the conjunctive nature of the musical ensemble where all members were required to contribute effectively for the well-functioning of the group. In order to respond to the need for balance, ensemble musicians got involved in a process of musical adaptation whereby alternative musical possibilities were considered in an open and flexible manner by experimenting with different sounds and getting engaged in a kind of active listening. However, a number of conditions such as the size of the group, the hall acoustics, the players' technical ability, their prior experience or lack of experience, could enhance or constrain this balance seeking process.

The need to find balance in ensemble playing required the pianists' direction of attention out of themselves in order to become aware of the co-performers. The musicians' attention in ensemble playing was mainly externalised through the auditory and visual modes according to the pianists interviewed. Aural communication, in particular, involved active

listening fluctuating between one's own playing, the others' playing and the overall sound. Visual communication, on the other hand, involved the direction of the players' attention towards those visual stimuli that allow the exchange of valuable bodily information about the co-performers' intentions and imminent action for the purpose of achieving co-ordination. Overcoming any technical limitations and preparing adequately the musical material facilitated the pianists' ability to perceive visual and aural cues in the ensemble playing context. Ensemble members used their social skills, such as being democratic, encouraging each other, showing respect and politeness, negotiating, showing discretion and sensitivity, in order to support each other and allow each musician's potential to be brought out rather than being discouraged. Through this process, not only were the participants' social skills further developed, but also they were able to observe their own self through the co-performers' eyes and develop, therefore, a more objective and consciously informed perspective. When the players managed to externalise their attention towards the ensemble environment efficiently by achieving effective aural and visual communication with the co-performers, the quality of the ensemble playing was enhanced.

The players' externalisation of attention towards the ensemble environment seemed to be especially useful for the pianist who was found to hold a regulatory function in the musical ensemble. Two main reasons explained the emergence of the pianist as a strong link, firstly, the specificities of the piano as an instrument which allowed the pianist to support the other instruments in the ensemble and, secondly, the central position of the piano particularly in the piano trio repertoire. Moreover, the pianist acquired a regulatory role in the accompanying context, where he/she held a supportive role both in a musical and a moral sense. In order to meet the requirements of his/her role, the pianist had the full score during playing which appeared to allow him/her to cope with any unpredictable circumstances that might occur during the performance. The main purpose of the pianist would be to restore the musical

flow and bring the ensemble back on the right course of action by taking remedial action and making decisions on the spot when necessary. Considering the unpredictability of the live performance, the pianist was also required to recognise and react to the cues given from co-performers by listening actively, being alert, fast and spontaneous. However, conditions such as group size, experience facilitation, repertoire mediation and the pianist's restrained bodily approach were found to affect the regulating role of the pianist in the musical ensemble. Moreover, in his/her attempt to contribute to a high quality performance, the pianist was particularly preoccupied with the fear of letting the co-performers down experiencing, therefore, high levels of responsibility.

The attainment of high ensemble quality eventually emerged as a state of integration both among co-performers and with the audience where the musicians performed as a unified whole rather than as separate elements. The achievement of integration among the co-performers seemed to involve all musicians' deep involvement with each other which was also found to attract the attention of the audience and assist, therefore, in the musicians' integration seeking process with the audience. In addition to the musicians' involvement, the achievement of integration with the audience also involved the musicians' consideration of the expectations and reactions of the audience. Moreover, the pianists felt that they performed at their best, firstly, when they felt closely connected with each other, secondly, when they enjoyed the repertoire and were adequately prepared, thirdly, when they sensed the co-performers' enjoyment and, finally, when they were engaged in an effective aural communication with each other. This integrated state was described as a kind of flow experience, on the one hand, whereby the co-performers were effortlessly attuned to each other's sound and expressive intentions. On the other hand, it appeared to lead to the emergence of a group kind of self where each individual contribution was an essential component part of the overall musical result but did not exist in isolation. However, the

achievement of integration with the co-performers and with the audience would be inhibited by a number of factors. These involved the derogatory attitude that some audience members often hold regarding the accompanist's role in the musical ensemble as well as the derogatory behaviour and exaggerated expectations that some singers may have of the pianist.

High quality in musical ensemble performance would also be enhanced by the existence of enough time for practising and rehearsing. Time drew a major divide between short-term and long-term musical ensembles. In the latter case, the players' prior familiarity and connection with each other appeared to provide a foundation where further ensemble preoccupations were built upon. When there was time available, ensemble musicians were committed to practising individually before and/or after rehearsing with the co-performers. However, when there was not enough time for practice, the ability to sight-read was beneficial. Conditions, such as the importance of the performance, the familiarity, difficulty, enjoyment and choice of the repertoire appeared to affect the amount of rehearsal time required for a particular performing occasion.

The existence of sufficient practice time in the musical ensemble has been found to signify an element of quality and of deliberate manipulation of sound in contrast to the consequences of lack of time which would denote rather an element of quantity. In other words, time availability has been linked to a kind of active listening and the attainment of depth in the musical production, which was additionally found to involve profound understanding and knowledge rather than the pure employment of skill. The reliance on sight-reading, however, was found to have drawbacks, such as a difficulty to listen actively to the co-performer, rapidity and superficiality in the learning of the music unlike the depth and thoroughness that time availability appeared to entail. In short, lack of practice time was reported to indicate the employment of skill rather than knowledge where the purpose was to

make the performance work with the means available in contrast to the attainment of high quality in the musical ensemble performance.

The main concepts of the story line are presented in *figure 7*.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR ELEMENTS OF AN EMERGENT THEORY

The phenomenon under investigation here is how the pianist perceives the ensemble musicians' action and interaction for the purpose of performing. The core concept that appeared to link all categories together was found to be the musicians' desire to reach high quality in the ensemble performance. The attempt to locate all categories around the Paradigm Model led to the identification of the category searching for balance as the cause being directly linked to the externalisation of attention category which was considered to be the context. Regulating is the action of the phenomenon of group interaction in musical ensemble performance as perceived by the pianist. The musicians' externalisation of attention and regulating capacity could lead to the achievement of integration or lack of integration among ensemble members and with the audience as a consequence of their interaction. Moreover, time availability or lack of time was found to facilitate or constrain respectively the ensemble musicians' interaction as perceived by the pianist. The way the categories are linked to each other in terms of the paradigm model is presented in *figure 8*.

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An attempt was made to diagrammatically represent the emergent categories in an abstract way and eventually the elliptical form shown in *figure 9* was created.

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As figure 9 shows, the musicians' desire to reach high musical quality in the ensemble performance is related to all categories. For this reason, it was placed outside the ellipse

indicating that it affects all categories. As the categories were located around the paradigm model, searching for balance was identified as the cause, externalisation of attention as the context, regulating as the action, and the achievement of integration or lack of integration was identified as the consequence. Finally, the time availability or lack of time category involved the conditions that could facilitate or constrain respectively the musicians' interaction. Particular attention should be given to the arrows named conditions, which represent those factors found to affect the various steps towards the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance. These factors are the sum of the intervening conditions identified in each category.

Overall, this study has primarily been an attempt to investigate how pianists understand what they do as active members of musical ensembles in their interaction with other ensemble players. In particular, the study's main interest was to understand the pianist's perspective on the nature of the ensemble players' emotional and behavioural involvement with one another as they get engaged in a preparation process for the purpose of performing in public. The study was based on the points of view of professional pianists with ample ensemble playing experience who were all experts in their field. They offered, therefore, rich and valuable information on those elements that would enhance the ensemble players' effective interaction as well as on the particular aspects of a pianist's skill that would contribute to the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance.

However, it cannot be claimed that the model would apply to every professional pianist who has experienced participation in small musical ensembles in the classical tradition medium. Hence, a limitation of this kind of study is its lack of 'generalisability'. This was an unavoidable outcome of the study's primary aim of gaining a deep understanding of the pianists' viewpoints for two reasons.

Firstly, the investigation of the subject required theoretical sampling based on the pianists' extensive participation in ensemble music making. Not all pianists that were contacted could take part in the study. Moreover, the considerable demands of the interviewing process in terms of travelling time and financial requirements acted as a constraining factor during the data collection process.

Secondly, the twenty in-depth interviews produced an enormous amount of data repeated again and again as the interviewing process progressed. This was a sign that the study had reached the point of theoretical saturation, which, according to the Grounded Theory methodology, indicates the closure of the data collection stage of the research. Thus, the five categories were fully developed in terms of their conditions, strategies and consequences before the end of the data collection phase. However, more research needs to be done to investigate the 'generalisability' of the model to other samples of pianists.

Future research could also employ quantitative methodological approaches to test the results of this study. Such studies could take into account, for instance, variables such as years of ensemble playing experience, educational background, personality, age, gender or cognitive style.

Moreover, further research could apply, elaborate and extend the proposed model, together with the conditions found to affect it to other members of small musical ensembles and to other related disciplines. In particular, the consideration of the perspectives of other ensemble musicians, such as string and wind players or singers, would allow the validation of the present model and its extension to a broader theory on the issue of how different musicians perceive their participation in small musical ensembles and what particular skills they need in doing so. Such viewpoints would provide insights into the nature of group membership in the case of ensemble playing. It would also be interesting to draw on the experience of different instrumentalists or singers and compare how the particularities of

each instrument or of the singing act would affect and shape the musicians' perceptions of their own contribution to the group and of the various musical and social interactions among group participants.

Finally, considering the positive effects of ensemble playing participation on the musical and social development of music students, music educators should encourage their students' participation in musical ensembles by arranging them in small performing groups as often as possible. Moreover, it would be of interest if such effects could be further examined in order to identify specific variables and factors, such as personality, age, gender and ability that would optimise the benefits that music students can gain from their participation in small musical ensembles.

The above mentioned points will assist the expansion of the theoretical model presented in this paper which investigated the pianist's perspective on the attainment of high quality in musical ensemble performance offering unique insights into the nature of a pianist's participation in the ensemble playing context.

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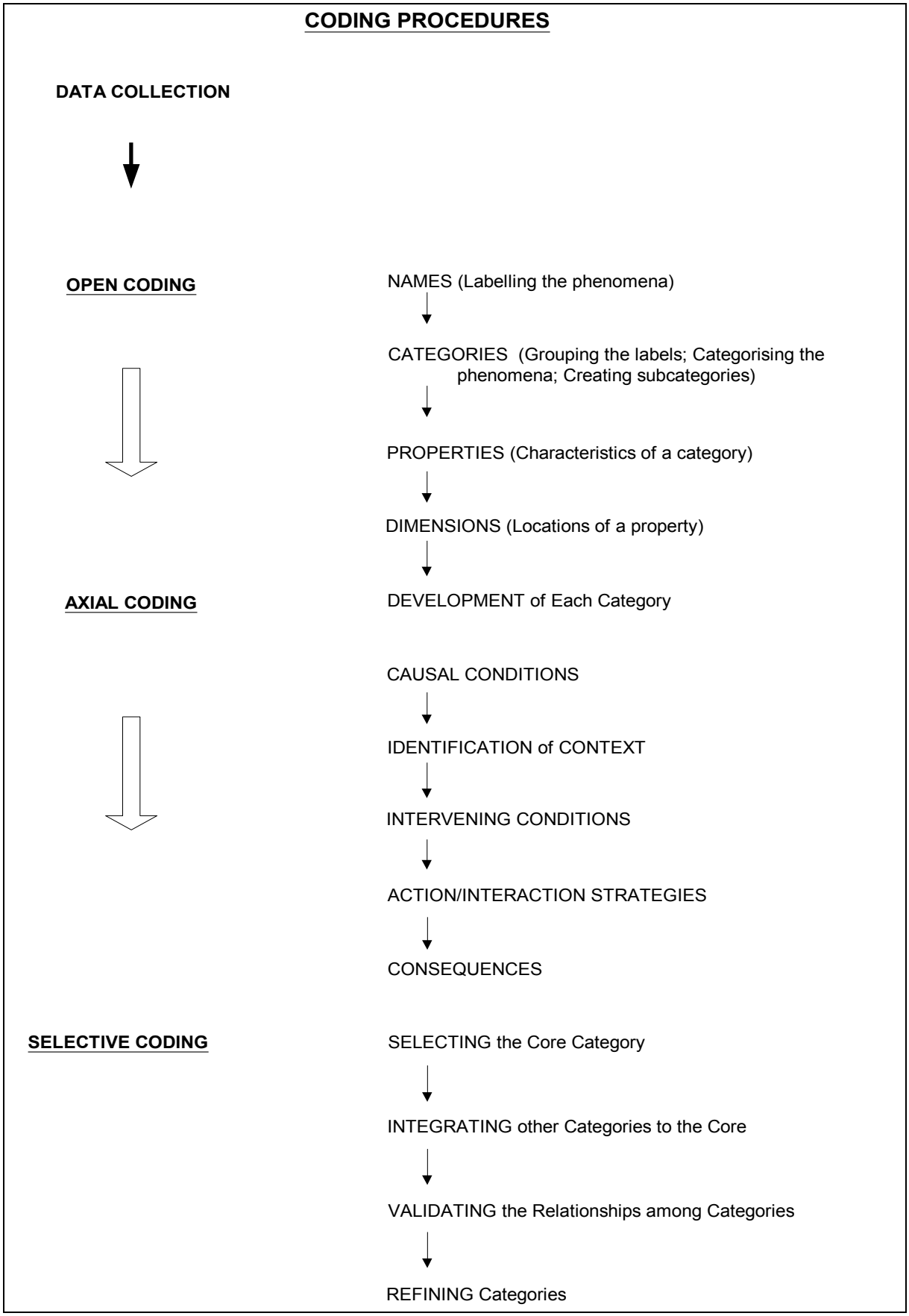

Figure 1: Coding Procedures in Grounded Theory (Taken from Zafeiriou, 2000, p.116)

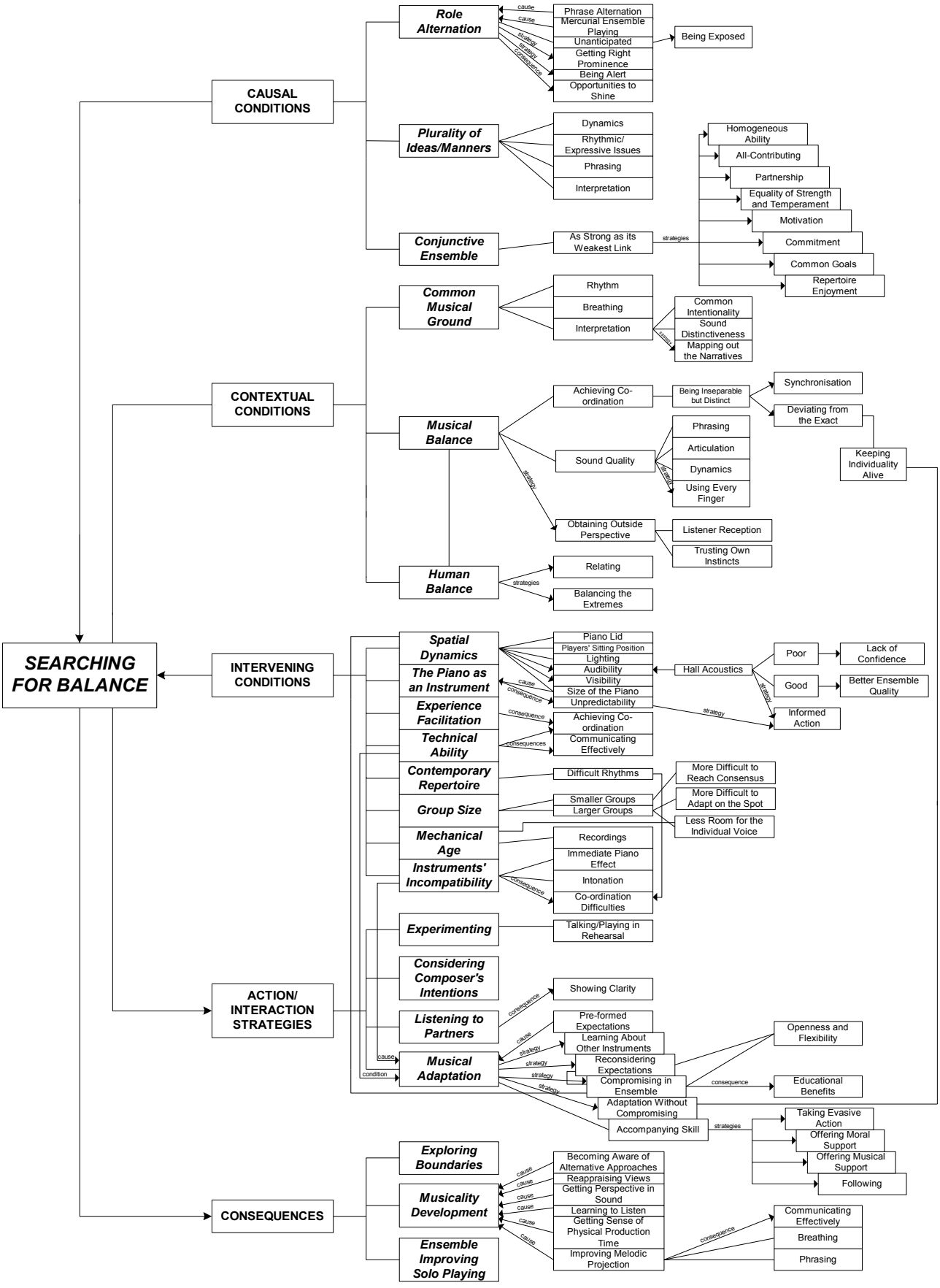

Figure 2: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences of the Search for Balance in Ensemble Playing

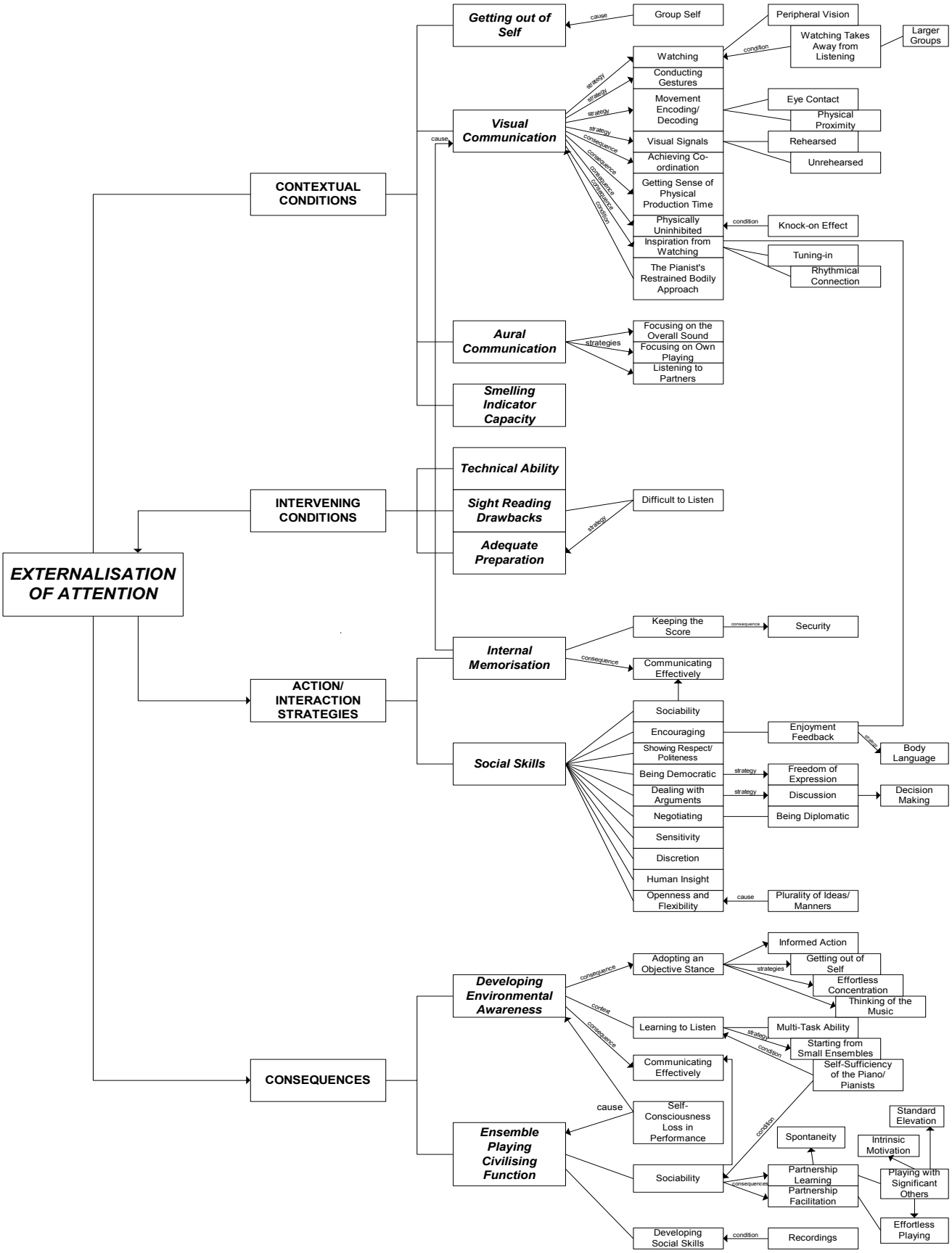

Figure 3: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences of the Musicians' Externalisation of Attention in Ensemble Playing

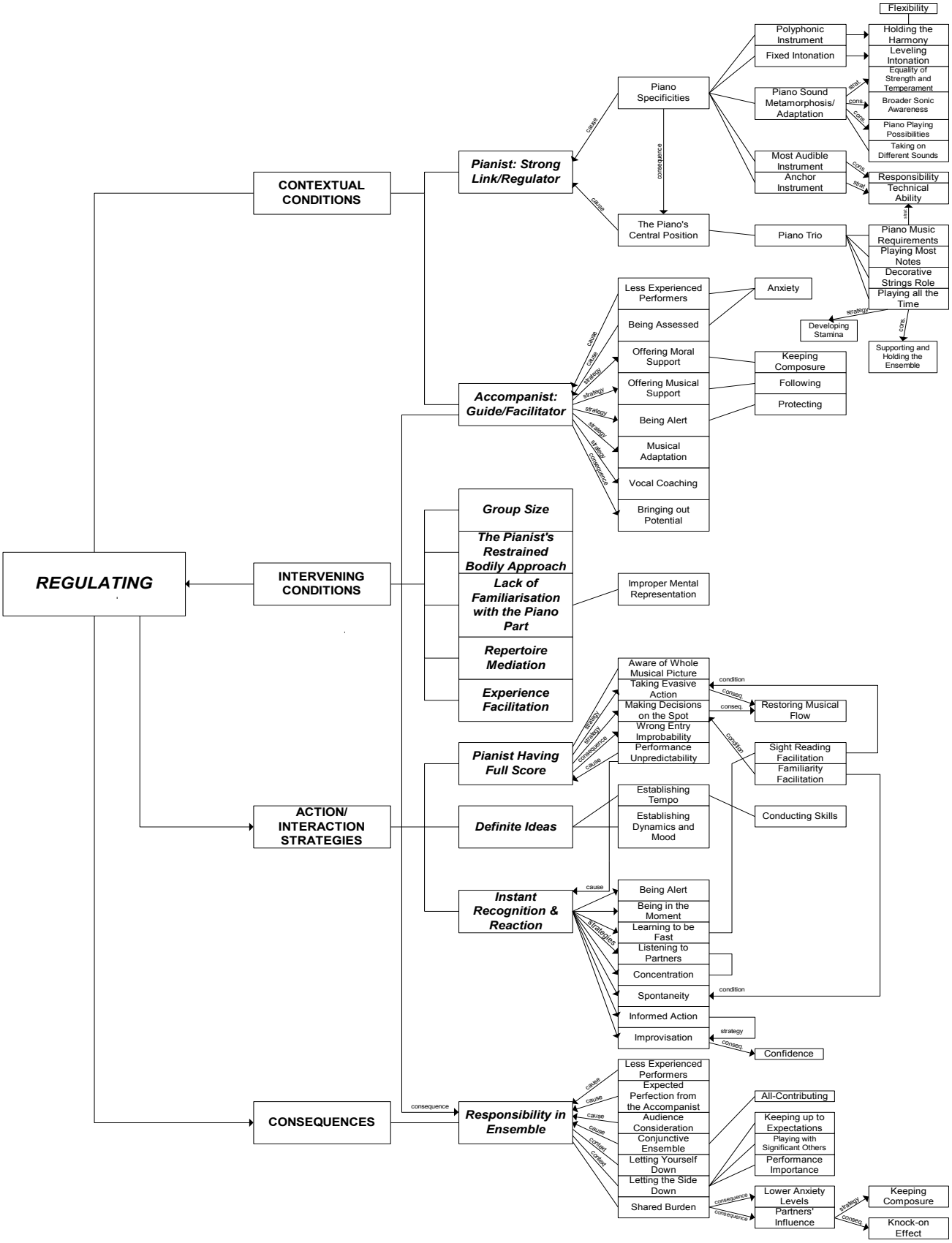

Figure 4: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences of the Pianist's Regulating Role in the Musical Ensemble

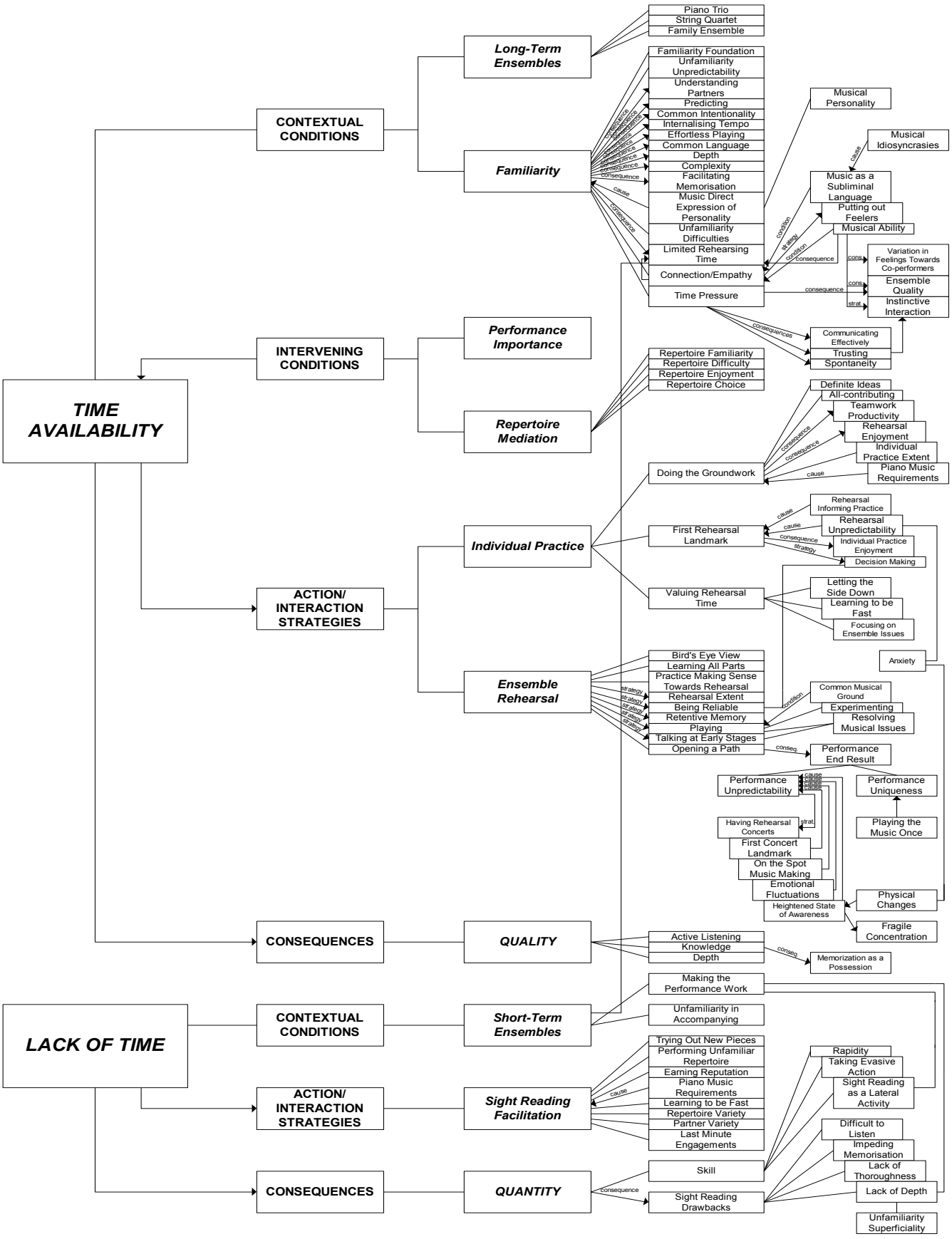

Figure 5: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences of Time Availability or of Lack of Time in Ensemble Playing

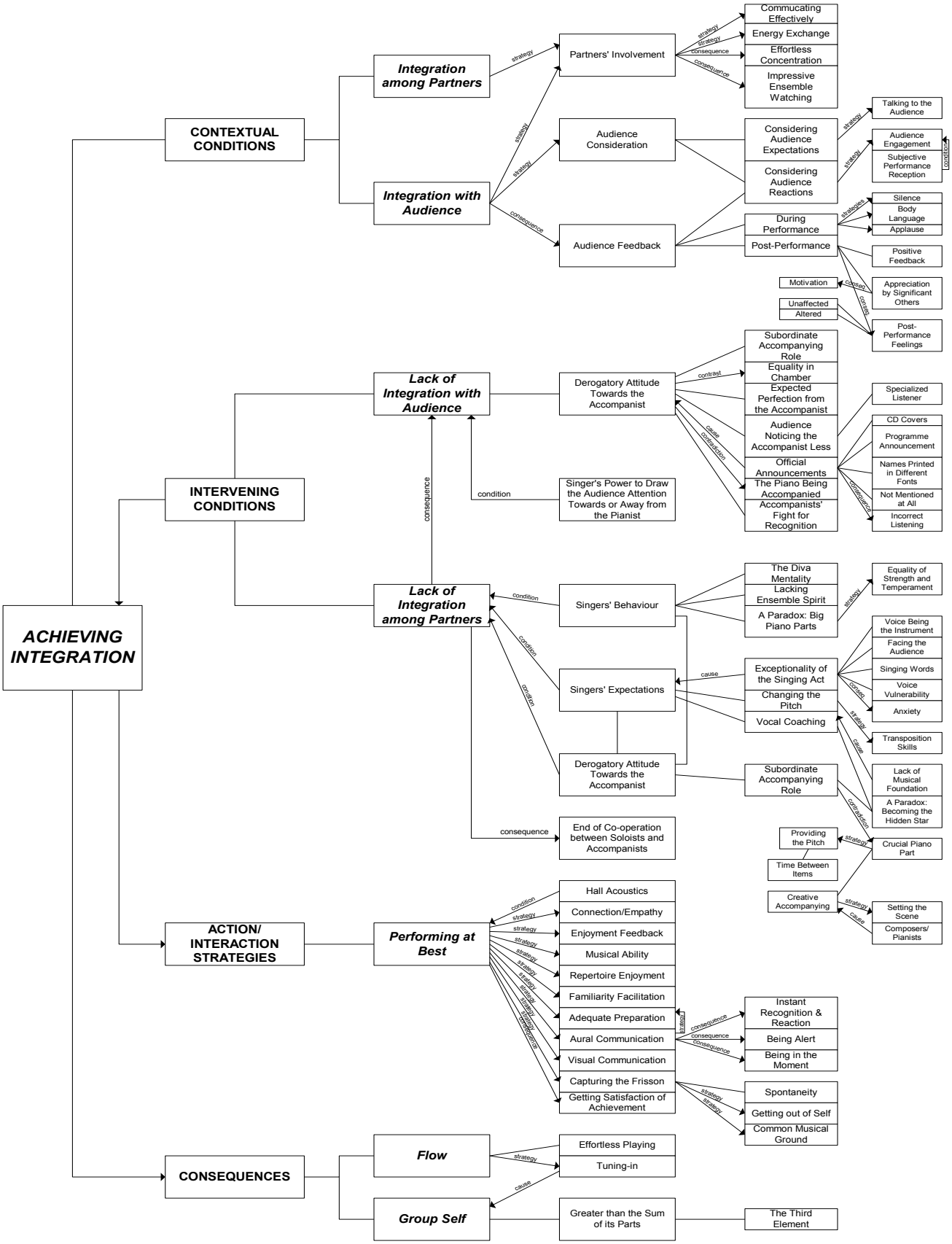

Figure 6: Conditions, Strategies and Consequences of the Achievement of Integration in Ensemble Playing

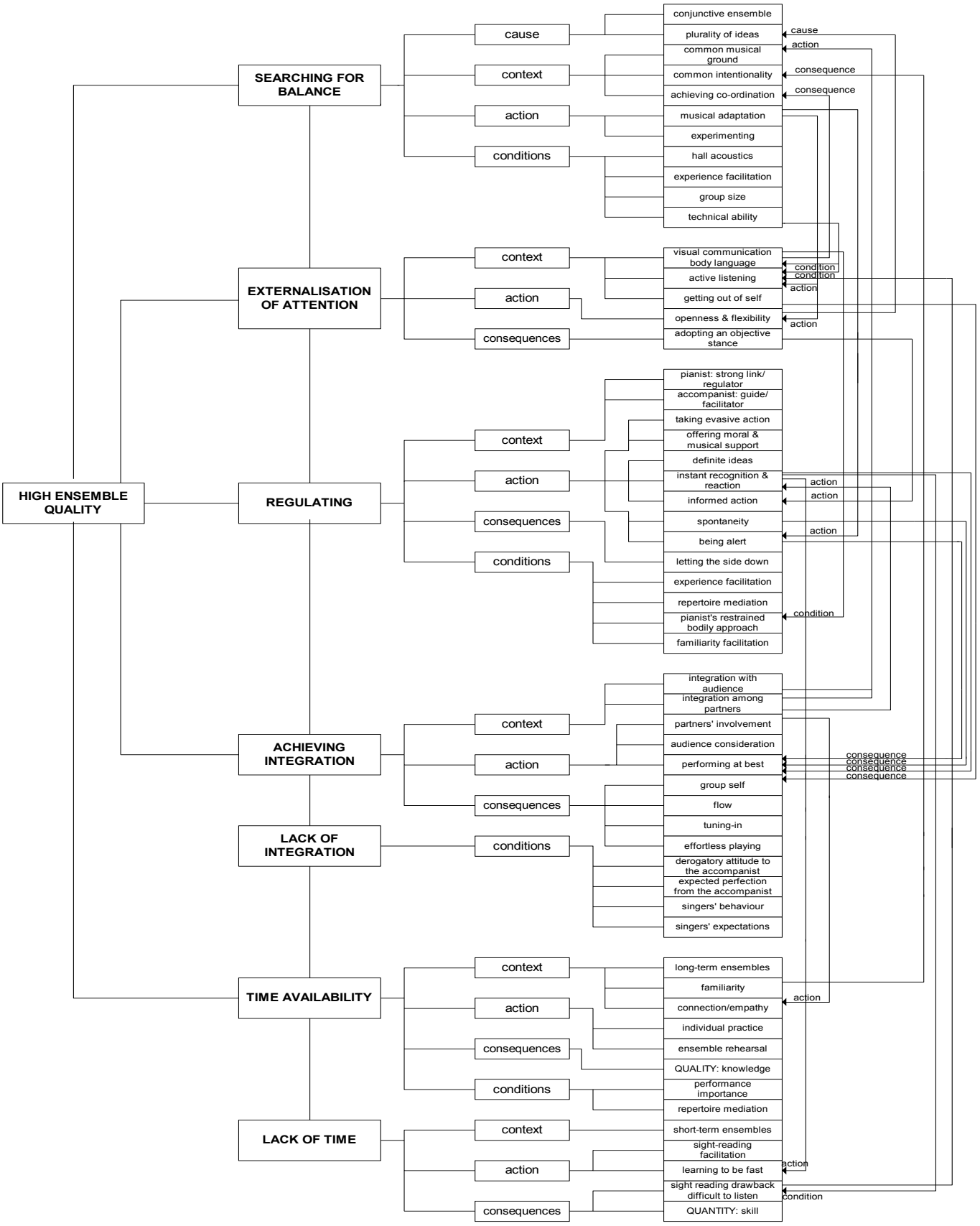

Figure 7: Story Line - Main Concepts

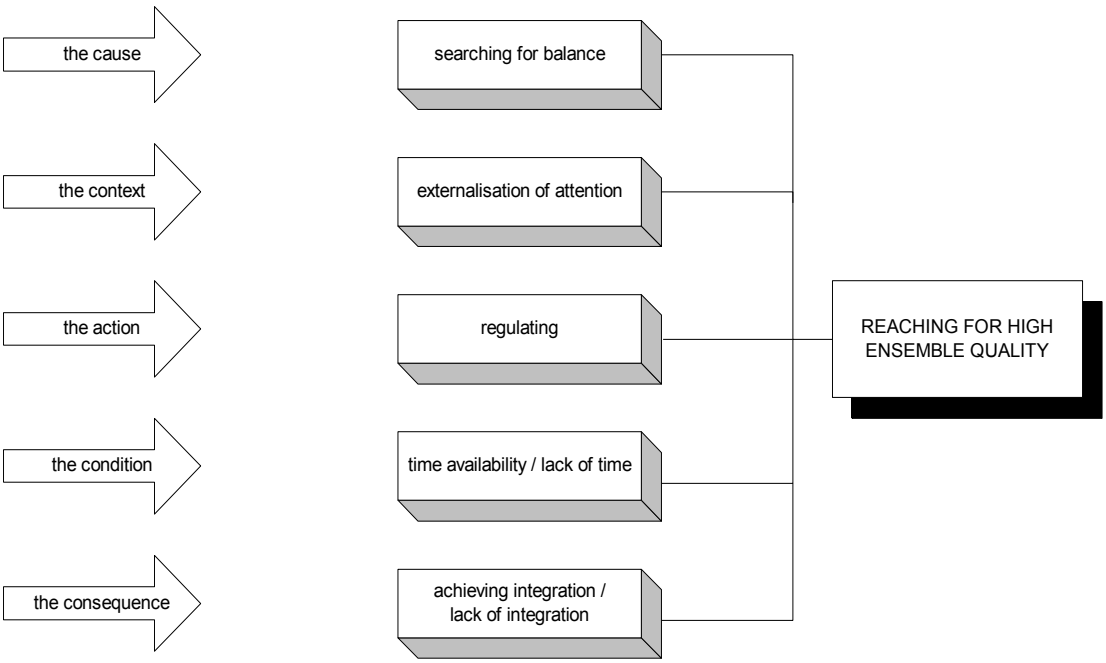

Figure 8: Categories Identification

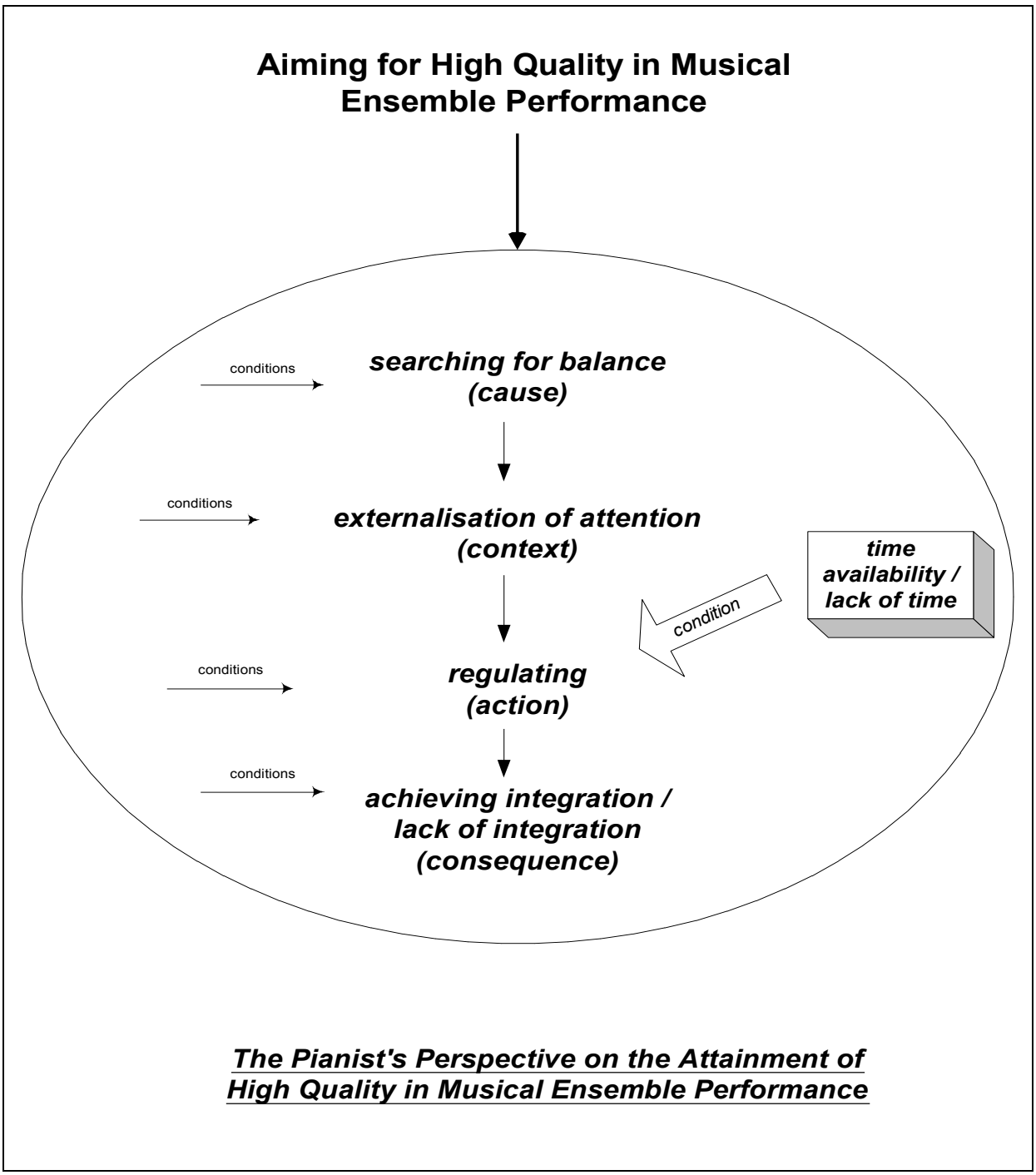

Figure 9: The Pianist's Perspective on the Attainment of High Quality in Musical

CONDITIONS:

group size, instruments' incompatibility, mechanical age, technical ability, experience facilitation, familiarity facilitation, the piano as an instrument (size of the piano), spatial dynamics (hall acoustics), adequate preparation, sight-reading drawbacks (difficult to listen), the pianist's restrained bodily approach, lack of familiarisation with the piano part, repertoire familiarity, repertoire difficulty, repertoire enjoyment/choice, derogatory attitude towards the accompanist, expected perfection from the accompanist, singers' behaviour, singer's expectations, performance importance

APPENDIX - A SAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The questions that follow are only a sample of the ones covered in the interviews. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, depending on each particular pianist's interests and concerns, new questions were added and non-relevant ones were omitted in order for the flow of the conversation to be followed in accordance with the semi-structured interview schedule.

What is your ensemble experience at present? How was your interest in ensemble playing developed?

What differences, if there are any, could you identify in yourself, according to your experience, between playing with somebody else and playing solo?

What do you think would be the similarities & differences between accompanying and chamber music playing? What do you like more during the performance, being the soloist or the accompanist or a chamber music player? Why? What kind of abilities do you think that a pianist in ensemble should possess?

Do you think that it is important for the pianist in ensemble playing to possess sight-reading ability or not? What are the pros and cons of sight-reading in ensemble playing?

What is your attitude towards improvisation and composition? Would some knowledge of improvisation and composition help the pianist in ensemble playing or not?

Do you perform from memory?

Do ensemble players try to achieve balance? In what respect? Why? How can balance be achieved?

Do you try to achieve co-ordination in the ensemble? How is it achieved? How would you define co-ordination in ensemble playing?

Do you vary yourself/your approach in any way depending on the different individuals that you play with and the different situations you find yourself in? If yes, how? In what sense?

How do you choose your repertoire? Do you usually like the repertoire you perform?

What is your attention focused on / directed towards during ensemble playing?

Do you exchange feedback with the co-performer(s)? In what manner?

How do you think co-performers should behave towards one another? Why? Do you have any arguments/disagreements with the soloist or the chamber music partner? How do you approach those?

Do you feel that as the pianist you have a central, equal or subordinate role in ensemble performance?

What are your concerns in ensemble performance?

When are you more nervous, when you perform solo or when you play in ensemble?

How many people do you usually like to play with?

Do you usually rehearse and perform with musicians that you know in advance or with unfamiliar musicians as well? What do you prefer? Why?

Do you practise each piece before the rehearsal with the soloist (or with your partner in chamber music)?

How much do you usually rehearse with the soloist or your chamber music partner before the performance?

How would you describe the rehearsal process in terms of teamwork?

When do you feel that you perform at your best? How do you feel when this happens? How would you perceive an ensemble performance of high quality as an audience member?